

Leadership is the  
art of getting  
others to do  
something that  
you want done  
because they  
want to do it.

*-Dwight D. Eisenhower*

## Improving Instruction

### Determine The Change You Want To Make

- What Would You Like To See More Of?

- What Would You Like To See Less Of?

- Three Levels of Change

- 1 to 3 Specific Things

## **Introducing The Concept**

- **First Exposure**
- **Points of Least Resistance**
- **Whole Part Whole**
- **Make New Seem Normal**
- **Everybody Is Doing It**

## **Working With Individuals**

- **Treat Them As If**
- **Be In Classrooms**
- **More Comfortable To Do It Than Not**
- **Reinforce Changed Behaviors**
- **Miscellaneous**

# Power Plays of Difficult Employees

**O**ur most negative employees can batter the morale of an entire school or district. Preventing the detrimental effects they cause is one of the biggest challenges an educational leader faces.

Difficult employees can take their toll on the rest of us in various ways. However, the one aspect over which we retain the most control is how much power we choose to give them. We surrender way too much power to these negative people. And it isn't just us. Everyone in our organization does.

People in leadership roles often make decisions based on their least effective staff members rather than their most effective and essential contributors. Even as peers we give away too much power to our most negative coworkers.

## Test Yourself

Leaders often make decisions based on their most negative and resistant employees. That is human nature. We worry about how the most cynical staff member will react or how the few "grippers" will talk about us or this new idea in the lounge. Being aware of their potential reactions is fine. However, making decisions with them in mind rather than our most positive and pro-

## A three-question litmus test to gauge the likely effect of your rules to change bad behavior

ductive people is a big mistake.

When deciding whether to implement a new policy or rule, ask yourself these three quick questions to determine whether the proposal is likely to have a positive or a negative effect:

1. What is the true purpose in implementing this rule or policy?
2. Will it actually accomplish the purpose?
3. How will my most positive and productive people feel about it?

This sounds basic, and it is, but it can be a powerful measure of not only future implementation; it can also help determine the value of current procedures. Let us apply these questions to a scenario common in many schools: exceeding the photocopy machine budget.

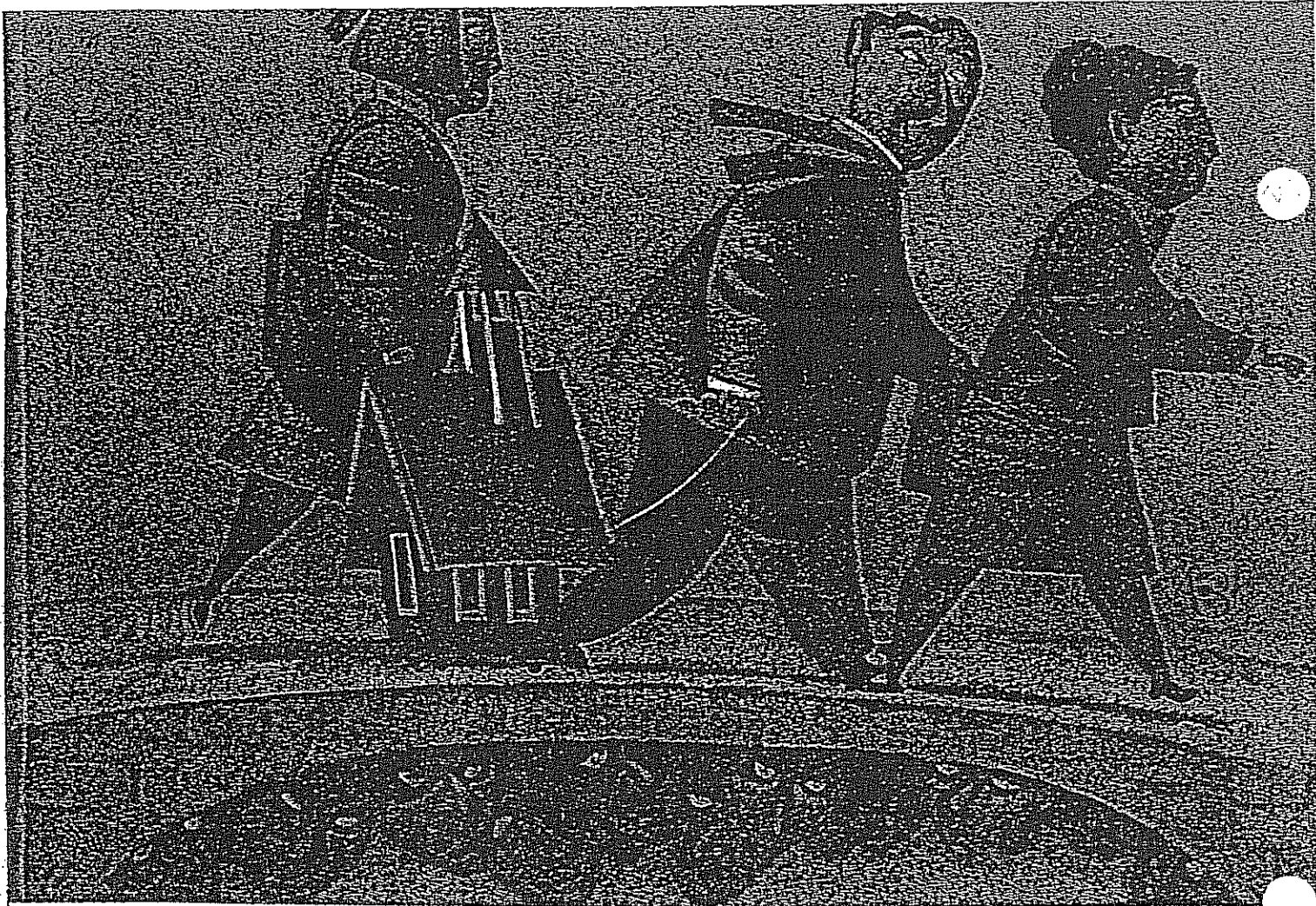
In many educational settings, we realize about mid-February that we have

almost exhausted the copier budget for the entire school year. We also realize several individuals are constantly at the copier and may seem to be using it disproportionately compared to other faculty. One thing that happens in many organizations is a sign gets posted by the copy machine: "Limit 20 Copies!"

## Forecasting Effects

With this scenario in mind we can apply the same three questions to the change in behavior we are attempting to put in place to control a few difficult staff members. Will the new rule likely have an appropriate and positive effect on our school?

Another common situation that arises in schools is faculty use of supplies at a frequency that quickly will exceed the annual budget. Our instinct suggests a few people most likely are using things in an inappropriate manner or maybe even for personal use. As a result, we are tempted to implement much stricter restrictions on accessing the supply cabinet. We may require all staff to sign a piece of paper indicating how many copies they use. Or we might have all staff sign up on a list when they take any supplies. We may even issue a memo expecting staff to reduce their use of photocopies or supplies.



This is the guilty until proven innocent approach. Or we can apply our three rules to gauge whether this approach is appropriate.

*What is the true purpose in implementing this rule or policy?*

Your first reaction might be to say that the purpose is to tick people off. However, that is the result, not the purpose. The purpose in creating this rule is to prevent those people who are wastefully using the copier or taking too many supplies from continuing these practices. In other words, it is to stop those who are abusing the copier.

*Will it actually accomplish the purpose?*

If people are doing something that is inappropriate, they probably already know it is improper and just choose to do what they want. No one assumes it is OK to run copies of their Christmas card letter on the school copier. You might be thinking, "I have people in my school who think it is OK to abuse the copier."

If that is true, ask yourself this: Would those individuals ask the principal or department chair to run off the copies for them? Obviously not. They sneak around and do it when no one is

watching. If this is true, it means they do know it is wrong but do it anyway. Some people will do so at any opportunity. However, these are very few. Is the sign likely to prevent the inappropriate usage of materials? Probably not.

Even if your answer is "maybe" or "yes," we still need to examine the potential result on our most important staff members—those who follow these be-

activity for which they ended up needing only 15. They are the most likely faculty members to restrict their usage of materials or supplies. Is this going to have a productive effect on the school?

If you could give any one staff member an extra \$250 for materials and supplies, which teacher would you be most confident would use this in a manner beneficial to students? The answer is the

**"Restricting the creativity of our most effective people seldom will have a positive effect."**

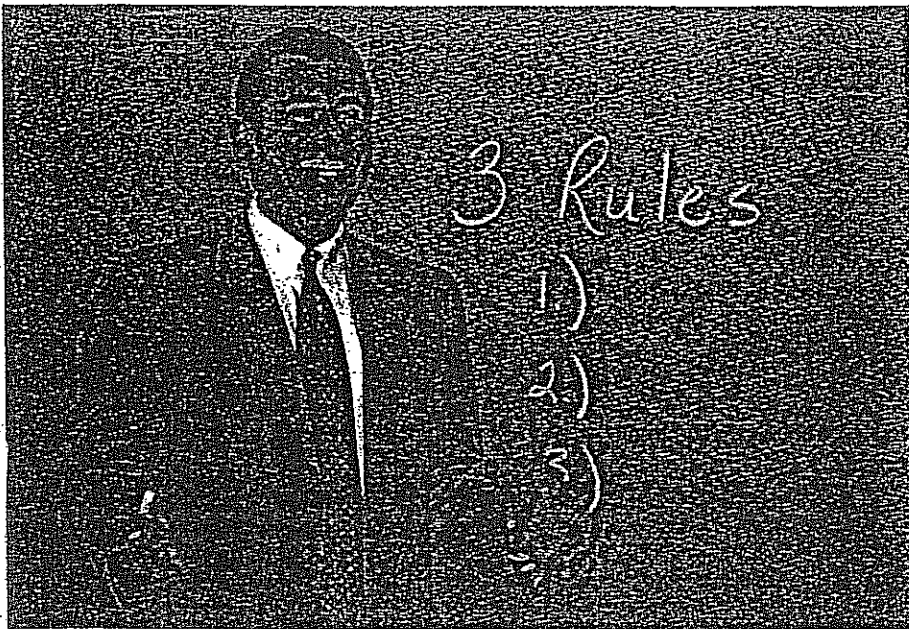
havioral standards before they are even put in writing.

*How will my most positive and productive people feel about this policy?*

High achievers, including your most effective staff, are often guilt driven. They are likely to assume that any time a new rule or procedure is implemented it could be because they have done something wrong. When you tell the staff that the copier is being used too much, the high achievers recall that time two years ago when they ran 25 copies for an

same super teacher who is most likely to reduce his or her usage of materials and supplies when a blanket rule is implemented.

Restricting the creativity of our most effective people seldom will have a positive effect. If you wonder how your most effective staff will receive a new expectation, the simplest method is to ask them prior to putting the policy in place. Effective and respected staff members generally will tell you the truth and not be a part of the rumor mill in a school



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district. Asking them in advance can help answer the final question before it could have a harmful effect on the morale of your most important staff members.

#### Hiandering Improvement

Sometimes when a school leader considers raising a new idea in a school, the first tendency is to wonder how that individual who we know will be most resistant will react. This is natural and a normal response. However, the true issue is whether we let the resister prevent our school from improving because of his or her disposition.

One workshop I have led for principals deals with applying Allan Glatthorn's work on differentiated supervision, including the idea of self-directed development. This term describes the process of teacher-directed improvement, such as goal setting. One way to carry this out is to train student film crews to videotape teachers in action in their classroom for later viewing and self-assessment.

A nice aspect of this idea is that it does not require more work on the part of the principal and it can lead to instructional improvement without added responsibility. Once I suggest this at a workshop, inevitably several principals will indicate they cannot implement the program because some of their teachers will refuse to participate. And my response is always, "so what?" If we do not do something that can assist some people in our school or some of our staff because a few will refuse to do it, then we are giving these resisters a great deal of power and thus limiting our school's potential.

The other thing to remember is that the first teachers who are likely to take advantage of many of these types of opportunities are our best staff members. Once they try something and then speak well of it, other faculty members will join in. So if a few never do, that should not spoil an excellent growth opportunity.

Our best teachers often are the risk takers. If they are the first to try out a new concept, the likelihood of it being successful is much greater than if a less effective staff member attempts it. Thus it is easier to have a positive role model whose example can be emulated by other staff.

#### Hallway Duty

Let me share one additional example about the importance of making every decision based on our most positive and productive staff members. I will use an example of a large traditional high school, whose school day consists of seven equal periods of roughly 50 minutes each. The schedule also allows five minutes or so of passing time when no one knows who is in charge of the school and the students seem to be in a mass state of excitement and hysteria. If you as an adult get caught up in this, it is like being a salmon swimming upstream.

What would we guess principals would like their teachers to be doing during this passing time? Probably they privately wish the teachers would be out in the hallways monitoring the students during the passing time. Typically, for the first few weeks of school, many teachers are out by their doors doing so. But then, we all get busy and become less inclined to venture outside. And anyhow, since fewer and fewer of our

peers are out there, why should we be?

By mid-year, the principal becomes frustrated that more teachers are not helping to monitor hallway traffic. So the principal issues a reminder via the all-powerful memo. We can imagine the reaction. Teachers pull the memo out of their mailboxes and immediately salute the piece of paper it is on and think to themselves, "Yes sir, just let me know the time, the place and the duty and I'll be there."

What happened here is that the principal issued a memo based on their least-effective teachers, not those who were actually out in the hallways. How could this situation be handled differently?

#### Alternative Situations

Let's consider two possible scenarios involving a faculty meeting where the administrator needs to address the issue of hallway monitoring. The administrator is determined not to let a few negative staffers ruin it for the rest.

Scenario No. 1: A faculty meeting in progress. The principal is speaking.

"Hey folks, listen. I expect every one of you to be out in the hallway between classes. Today there were two fights in the lower hallway and there were not any teachers out there. I expect every one of you to be out there between each class. We talked about that at the first meeting of the year and it is even in the faculty handbook!"

Now we apply our three rules and examine the results.

*What was the purpose?*

The purpose was to get more staff to monitor the hallways. How do the superstars feel? Probably ticked off. "What are you talking to me for?" they are thinking. "Why don't you talk to them!"

*Will this actually accomplish the purpose?*

Are the effective staff more or less likely to be out in the hallway tomorrow? Less likely. And they are likely to be in a bad mood because of the approach we used.

Wasn't it the mediocres we were addressing? Those who were even at the meeting could not care less. Those who were in attendance are thinking, "If I was going to get yelled at, I am glad I wasn't out there!"

*How will our most positive and productive staff feel about it?*

Unfortunately, our best people will have a less positive view of us.

Scenario No. 2: A faculty meeting in progress. The principal is speaking.

"Hey folks, listen. I know how full

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continued from page 14

everyone's plates are and I just appreciate, so much, those of you who have made that extra effort to be out in the hallway. Today I happened to be out in the hallway and there were two boys who were about to fight. There also was a teacher out in that hall, and I don't even think the teacher saw those boys. Anyhow, right before they came to blows, one of the boys saw the teacher, tapped his potential combatant on the shoulder and pointed to the teacher. They both shrugged and walked off in separate directions. I just appreciate so much those of you who are out in the hallway between classes. It makes our

school a safer place for all of our students, and it makes our school a safer place for all of us. Thank you."

Now apply the three rules and examine the results.

*What was the purpose?*

The purpose was to get more staff out in the hallway. How do the effective staff feel? Darn good.

*Will this actually accomplish the purpose?*

Amazingly, most of the effective teachers probably think the principal was talking about them since they didn't see any students about to fight! And they are more likely to be out in the hall tomorrow.

How do the mediocres feel? Some probably were feeling a little guilty.



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Some still were not paying attention. And some could not care less. But are they more or less likely to be out in the hall tomorrow? They will not all be there, but at least some additional staff are more inclined.

*How will our most positive and productive staff feel about it?*

Fortunately, our best people will have a more positive view of us. They enjoyed the praise without being singled out. This is called anonymous public praise. Everyone who was doing what was right thinks you were talking about him or her. Amazingly, even if no one was out in the hall, you can still use this approach. Because if no one was out there, then no one could know that no one else was out there!

Additionally, our mediocres will usually feel better. Some will want to get a piece of that praise so they will venture out in the hall the next day. Even our most resistant people will go out into the hall at least one day, even if only to see who the goody-two shoes are who are out in the hall.

### Controlling Ourselves

The benefits to the group are obvious. People will feel better and more valued. However, how does this make us feel? makes us feel much better than a negative approach does.

Think about your behavior at some moment in front of a group of students or staff members of which you are least proud. Maybe you lost your cool or laced your verbal barrage with sarcasm? How did you feel? Of course we regretted that we chose to behave in that fashion. It may have even been a challenge to look those people in the eye for a while. Now think about which student or staff member we were most ashamed saw us this way. Most likely the student we had the most respect and regard for.

What is in it for us is that we can feel better about the way we treat others. The more respect and dignity we show for others, the more respect and dignity we feel for ourselves.

Making sure that we take control of ourselves is an essential step to reducing the impact and influence we have on negative people that we come in contact with. After all, managing difficult people first requires that we manage ourselves. ■

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**Raise  
The  
Praise**

**Minimize  
The  
Criticize**

# 5 Things That Help Praise Work

**Authentic**

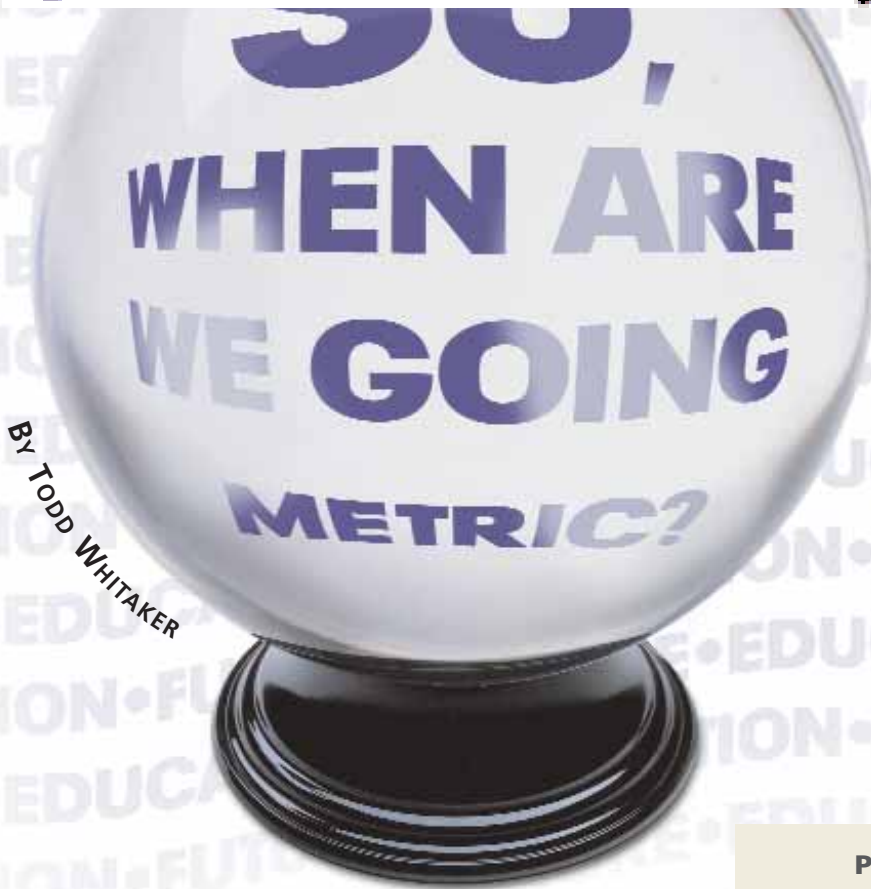
**Specific**

**Immediate**

**Clean**

**Private**

# PREDICTING the Future of Education



By Todd Whitaker

**R**ecently, I was asked to speak on the topic of futurism at an upcoming leadership conference. When I asked for some specifics about what they wanted me to do, I was told to talk about what is needed to be successful in education for upcoming generations. My first response was “I don’t know anything about the future.” Then, after hesitating only briefly, I added, “Well, on second thought, the only thing that I know for sure about the future I learned in elementary school many years ago. I learned that any day now we are going metric and we have to be prepared. Other than that, I do not know anything for sure about the future.”

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## PREVIEW

Despite the constant search for reform solutions, the future of school improvement depends on people not programs.

Schools must hire excellent teachers and strive to make all teachers as good as the best teacher in the school.

Outstanding principals know that their primary role is to teach teachers how to provide a high-quality education for students.

The fate of the metric system in the U.S., despite my teacher's promises in fourth grade, makes me hesitant to make predictions, but I did begin to reflect seriously about our ability to have schools that can develop students for the 21st century and I think having good teachers is the key.

### Teaching Skills for the 21st Century

We do not need all of our teachers to reach some mystical level. We just need all of our teachers to be like our best teachers. In my mind, that is what we need to have a great school. What do you think? Would it improve your school if all of your teachers were as good as your very best staff members? If so, how can we do it?

### It's People, Not Programs

When I speak to teachers and principals, I often ask whether anyone has ever been in a poor-lecturer's classroom. Routinely, every hand in the audience is raised. Then I ask the group, "Which of those three words is the problem: poor, lecturer's, or classroom?" And to help out, I always eliminate door number three: classroom. So basically, I ask what the real problem with a poor-lecturer's classroom is, and the answer is consistently a resounding "lecture"! Although the overwhelming response is lecture, it is also overwhelmingly wrong. The answer is poor! Have you ever been in a good-lecturer's classroom? Of course, we all have. That should tell us that the answer is not lecture. Yet, we all repeat the chant that lecture is bad basically because someone told us that it is.

Realistically, every teacher in a school uses lecture some of the time. It is just that some of them are effective with it and others are not. However, instead of understanding and acknowledging those differences in effectiveness, we tend to latch onto the issue being the instructional practice rather than the person.

The issue with ineffective teachers is almost always the person, not the practice or program. I was working with a principal recently who was struggling with one of his least effective teachers. He was concerned about the teacher's professional appearance. I acknowledged that professional appearance is something that was quite important to me, but that it seldom was the cause of a person's effectiveness or

lack thereof. I asked the principal, "If this teacher started dressing better, would that change the dynamic in the classroom?" The principal reflected for a moment and then answered sadly, "No. If he wore a tuxedo to class every day, he still would not be able to engage the students." Exactly. There is no reason to focus on something that is a peripheral issue when the heart of the issue is the ineffectiveness of a staff member.

Another principal shared a concern about a teacher who arrived late to school on a regular basis. When I asked him what the problem was, he responded that the teacher was arriving late to school. So, I asked more specifically, Is the problem that other teachers are upset? Is the problem that a promptness is important to you? Is the problem that a parent complained? What is the real problem?

The principal then answered, "The problem is that students are left unsupervised." I said, "That is the problem! If you get her to school on time but she lingers too long in the teachers lounge, you have addressed *a* problem, but not *the* problem."

Many times we think that programs are the problem or that programs are the solution. That is one reason we are so quick to jump on new ideas—open classrooms, whole language, block scheduling, etc. None of these ideas are wrong, and none of them are right. It all depends on the effectiveness of the staff members who are implementing them. The only reason to implement a program is to refine or enhance the skills of our staff members. The program itself is never the solution or the problem.

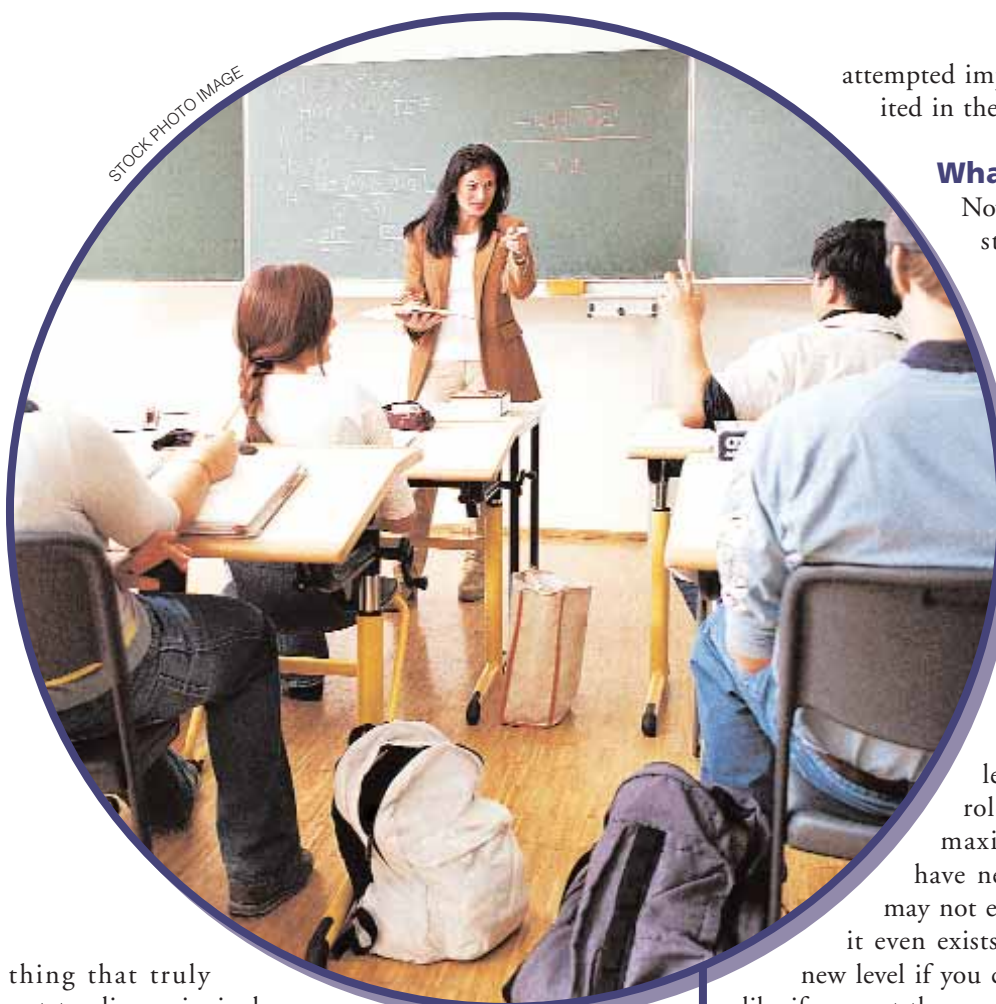
**We  
just need all of  
our teachers to be  
like our best teachers....  
Would it improve your  
school if all of your  
teachers were as good  
as your very best  
staff members?**

### Two Ways To Improve Our Schools

Although we look at myriad changes, there are only two ways to improve our schools. Hire better teachers or improve the ones we have. These are the only two things we can do. There have never been other solutions, nor will there ever be. Effective principals are quite aware of these being the key elements to school improvement, and we cannot choose one or the other. To be a great school we have to do both.

There is no question that the most important people in the school are the students. Obviously, they are the focus of everything that takes place in a school. However, one

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thing that truly outstanding principals are aware of is that their primary role is to teach the teachers. As a principal, the best way to have an exceptional learning environment for students is to have outstanding teachers working with them in the classroom. It is not the students who are the primary focus of outstanding principals. It is the teachers.

An opening in his or her teaching staff is the single most precious commodity a principal can ever have, and the quickest way to improve your school is to hire great teachers every time you get an opening. Just as the only way to improve your average grade in a class is to have your grade on your next assignment be better than your average grade, the most significant way to have rapid improvement in a school is to add teachers who are better than the ones that left. Although all principals have occasion to employ new staff members, the kind of staff members that great principals hire and the way and diligence by which they do it are what make our most effective peers different in the employer arena.

By nurturing the talents of newcomers and increasing the skills of veteran staff members, a principal has the recipe to continually make their school better. Without having a clear focus on these elements, other areas of

attempted improvement will continue to be limited in their effectiveness.

### What Is The Future?

Now that we have put aside our meter sticks because the revolution may not be quite so near after all, what do we do? The first thing we must do is realize the power we have to affect our schools by improving our teachers. Within every school's walls, there are role models who can help everyone be more effective. Rather than feel the need to reinvent the wheel, let's work on refining the ones we have. If the goal is to help all teachers be as good as our best teachers, a logical place to start is by giving everyone a chance to observe and learn from quality. Use the positive role models you have to help others maximize their talents. Many people have never seen great teaching, and they may not even know what it looks like or that it even exists. There is little chance to reach a new level if you cannot visualize what it would look like if you got there.

One of the great joys of being a principal is observing your best teachers. Expand the wealth throughout your school by having everyone participate. You will raise the level of respect that other staff members have for your very best teachers. If teachers do not have a chance to regularly observe in the classrooms of peers, they may not have any idea how good your best teacher is or how poor your worst might be. There is no chance that two ineffective teachers can help a new staff member be effective. If they knew how, they would be effective themselves. However, when we do have an opportunity to infuse new talent into our schools by adding a new teacher, one of the best things we can do is give them a chance to regularly interact with and observe our current top staff members. A wise man once told me, "You have to put your mules in horse races so at least they can see how fast four legged creatures can run." I guess this is true whether or not they are running kilometers. **PL**

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**Editor's note:** Whitaker's books include *What Great Principals Do Differently*, *What Great Teachers Do Differently*, and *Great Quotes For Great Educators*. For more information, visit [www.toddrwhitaker.com](http://www.toddrwhitaker.com).